

The season of glitter: dressing for holiday parties

By Russ Martin, Canada.com



A model wears an outfit from Pink Tartan collection, during the LG Fashion Week, in Toronto, Ont. Wednesday, October 21, 2009.

Photograph by: Brett Gundlock, National Post

For the social set, the holiday season is less about Christmas morning and more about the nights leading up to it. Between office parties, family gatherings and the annual black-tie galas that fill November and December, the holidays provide plenty of occasions to get dressed up.

From Anna Sui and Balmain to Canada's Pink Tartan, we've seen sequins return to the runway this year, so if you're planning an outfit for a night out on the town this holiday season, consider something that sparkles.

"You can safely say this is the season of glitter," says Holt Renfrew personal shopper Christina McDowell. "Everything has sequins on it." But McDowell also cautions to dress for comfort,

body type, and personal style before considering timely trends. “It’s important to understand your body proportions and how to dress for your body,” she says.

If you do decide to wear a sequined or sparkly dress, don’t go overboard; pair it with subtle accessories and shoes. Pick one or two focal points for each outfit and stick with them.

Wearing bold accessories is an easy way to update last year’s little black dress and to stay current without breaking the bank. If you’re looking to re-invent a piece that’s already in your wardrobe, consider adding a headdress or hair piece to the look.

“In the past few seasons hats, headbands and fascinators have begun to filter into the mainstream and into boutiques,” says Toronto-based designer Lara Vincent. The look has been popularized by TV show *Gossip Girl*, in which main character Blair Waldorf wears a headband in almost every scene, but it has also popped up all over the runway, and on the street.

Vincent says there’s a headdress for every occasion and recommends cocktail hats for holiday work parties. For black-tie galas, she says there’s a little more room to be creative. “A little 20’s style band with feathers and rhinestones is elegant. Or a top hat with a la garconne suit is sexy,” she says.

It’s also important that your accessories match your outfit. Chain link straps on purses are a big trend this season, but only work with certain looks, says Sienna Ray handbag designer Natalie van der Vorm. “If you’ve got a big ball gown, you don’t want the chain,” she says.

Whether you're dressing for a posh party or opening presents around a fire with your closest friends, it’s essential to pick an outfit that is appropriate for the occasion. If a party invitation doesn’t say what the attire is, call and ask to avoid showing up in an inappropriate outfit, advises Mihaela Ciocan, image consultant and president of Image Pro, a Vancouver-based business that offers personal shopping, special occasion styling, and colour and body analysis.

Ciocan says holiday business parties can be confusing occasions for women who want to both look their best and appear professional. “It’s still a business function,” she cautions. “Your regular clothes may reveal too much about yourself. If you have any doubts and are thinking ‘Is this appropriate?’ it’s probably not.”

Casual attire should be saved for gatherings with close friends or family, and even then Ciocan recommends pulling out an outfit you wouldn’t normally wear. “It’s still the holiday season, you’ve got to dress up a bit,” she says.